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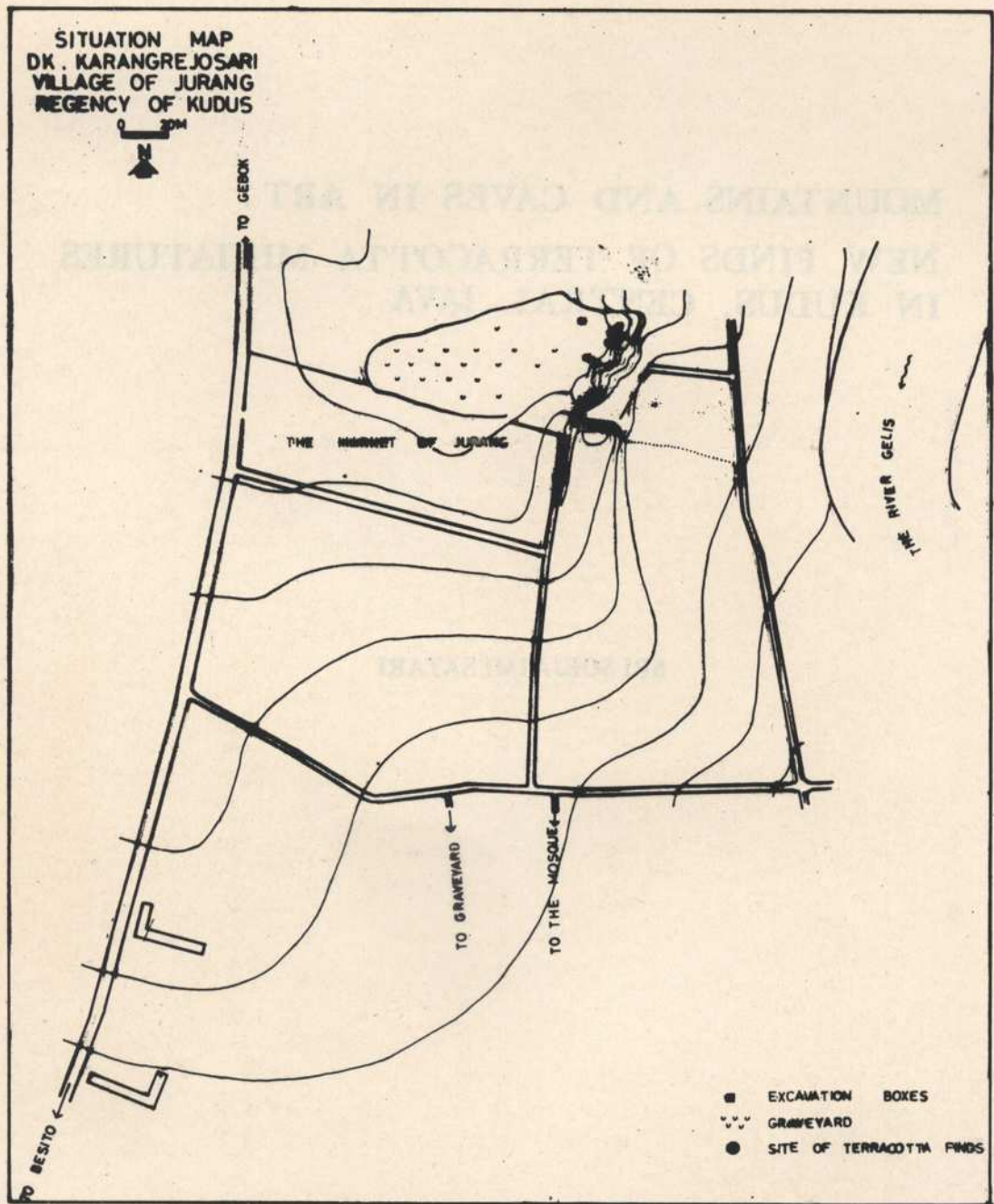
Map of the village of Jurang, Regency of Kudus

MOUNTAINS AND CAVES IN ART : NEW FINDS OF TERRACOTTA MINIATURES IN KUDUS, CENTRAL JAVA*

Introduction.

Early in 1978 an archaeological team of the National Research Centre of Archaeology was sent on an expedition to the north coast of Central Java. They came back *with the interesting report that they had found* many terracotta fragments in the village of Jurang, about 10 km. north of the town of Kudus.

As the result of this report, another team was sent to undertake an additional survey and an excavation at Jurang, hoping to find the clue to the identity of the finds. Here follows the account of the research undertaken during a period of two weeks.

The site and the finds.

Kudus, the capital town of the regency, was once the bustling centre of Moslem religious activities. Derived from the word '.al-kuds" meaning holy or pure,[1] Kudus is, according to Poerbatjaraka, the only town in Central Java bearing an Arabic name.

In view of the archaeological remains which still show traits of Hindu influence, such as the minaret of Kudus with its decoration of pottery dishes, and the winged gateway, Kudus must have already existed before the Moslem period[2].

The 14 th century Nagarakartagama mentions names of simas belonging to the Majapahit domains, among which is the name of the sima Suci[3], also meaning pure or clear. Some of the place-names may refer to Central Java, but since none of the names mentioned, including Suci, can yet be identified, even though Kudus and Suci have the same meaning, it whould be rash to assume that the name Suci was later changed into Kudus, for other towns still retain their Old Javanese names such as Demak, Lasem, and Juwana. A thorough investigation on the geographical names mentioned in the Nagarakrtagama is still to be done.

The site of the terracotta miniatures is on the slope of a hill which people called the punden (=holy place) of Pundisari, and is still considered to be sacred. On special occasions, such as a wedding celebration or when someone had just recovered from a serious illness, people made offerings in the form of earthenware plates or pots with covers, containing coins and flowers. Thus, with the passage of time, a huge pile of earthen plates, half buried in the ground, was formed on the slope beneath a tree, near the place where the miniatures were found[4]. (Plate no.1).

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Despite the promising surroundings the results of the excavated proved to be very disappointing. Only a very small number of unidentified potsherds were dug out from the five excavation boxes measuring 2 x 2 metres. The team became convinced that the miniatures had actually originated elsewhere. From information gathered from the eldest man in the village it come to light that they were transported from the surroundings of a nearby mosque, which was rebuilt in 1940. The peculiar offering of plates also seemed to be a tradition at that place where a saint called Kyai Sukun was entombed.

About 90 large and small fragments of terracotta have been excavated there and all are shaped in the form of hollow mountains or hillocks and bricks carved with caves and small holes. The following pieces are the most interesting finds of Jurang:

1. A fragment with a lenghth of 37 cm, height of 33 cm and 19 cm thick, depicts mountainous scenery. The large mountain top has broken down, but two hill tops still remain, standing side by side.

   The base of the hills is decorated with a pair of caves, topped by a stylized intricately carved kalahead. This kala rests on a bed of rocks indicated by small holes on the surface; behind the rocks on the body of the mountains incised lines are carved to denote creepers [5] (Plate no. 2).

2. A fragment (length 28 cm, height 23 cm, 8,5 cm thick), representing oblong cave-openings, decorate the base of the mountains, framed by straight-stemmed curly floral top. The mountain top has the form of a stylized elephant head, beautifully carved. More than five fragments decorated in this manner have been found[6] (Plate no. 3,4).

3. A fragment (23 cm long, 25 cm high, 24 cm thick) represents a scenery of small mountain peaks. A five-pillared hanging structure on a platform seemingly squeezed between the mountains, is carved on the slope[7] (Plate no.5). It has a square roof with diamond-shaped tiles, but only the frontsides are carved. The four ridges of the roof with their uptilted ends are decorated with rib-formed ornamentations such as we still see in Kudus today.

These five- pillared structures are sometimes depicted on Hindu temple reliefs[8] and sometimes as decorations on mosques from the transition period such as Mantingan and Sendangduwur[9]. They represent a sacred building.

4. Another fragment shows traces of a platform with six pillars. Unlike the five-pillared structure this one denotes a living quarter or a profane building[10].

5. An interesting fragment forms a part of a corner side where a single mountain is depicted; two sides of the base are hollowed to represent caves. The caves are not carved at the base of the central mountain, but at the base of two hills, having respectively the form of a sitting owl or bull (part of the head is damaged) and an unidentified animal, sitting dos-a-dos entwining their tails together[11] (Plate no.6).

6. Naturalistically shaped animals also enliven the scenery. A deer is seen sitting on top

of a hill and another fragment shows a sporting dog leaping up toward the bushes[12] (Plate no. 7).

7. Although thoroughly fired, not all of them are carved on the entire surface. A part of the terracotta which is supposed to be hidden from the public is sometimes deliberately left plain, or that particular part is left unfinished except for some incised outlines.

Based on the description above we come to some conclusions:

a. All miniatures depict mountainous scenery or gunungan decorated with stylized floral patterns.
b. Parts of the gunungan consisting of hills or hilltops are sometimes shaped into animal forms, such as an elephant's head, a lion and other fauna which usually frame a cave, thus replacing the floral motifs.
c. The relief of fauna which are detached from their decorative function and depicted as living creatures in the woods are shaped in their natural forms.
d. The five-pillared structure represents a hermitage, whereas the six-pillared pavilion depicts a resting-place.

The question that now arises is when were these terracotta miniatures produced and what was their purpose?
To answer the question we have to penetrate more deeply into the cultural and spiritual life of ancient Indonesia.

From the beginning of the first century Indonesian culture has been exposed to Indian influence. Indian religious systems and values merged and fitted smoothly into the already formed Indonesian community. This influence extended also to other forms of religious expression such as language, architecture and the arts.

The adaptation of the Indian culture in each region occured in different ways. Central Java for instance displayed a mastery in handling and modifying Indic tradition and styles[13], whereas East Java showed more indigenous traits.

One common feature which was found throughout Asia was the importance placed on the role of the mountain which symbolized the cosmic mountain.
The Hindus believed that the axis of the universe centered around the cosmic mountain, called the Mahameru, on top of which stood the palace of Brahma. Indra, lord of the heavenly beings had his grove on mount Sitanta, on the slope of the Himalaya, whereas different classes of gods, had their abode in its rocks and cave houses. The caves were also places of worship, retreat and congregation[14]

The ancient Chinese thought the earth to be square and flat, marked by five divine mountains, placed at the four corners of the earth, and one at the centre. The gods were thought to walk on their summits[15]

It was believed in the eighth century in Cambodia that the mountain was the axis

of the universe which was symbolized by a a temple built on top of a natural or a constructed mountain[16].
The Indian tradition regarding the cosmic mountain underwent some modification in Indonesia. The candi became a symbol of the cosmic mountain as well as the seat of the gods. A special form of the Mahameru with either five or nine peaks was much preferred. There even existed the legend of the transportation of the Mahameru to Java, the top of which became the nine-topped Mount Penanggungan[17] A smaller replica of the nine topped mountain was found at the bathing-place of Jalatunda. It had the form of a central spout surrounded by four medium-sized smaller spouts. while between them, four other still smaller columns were placed crosswise[18].

Mountain shaped objects used for religious purposes were also found. In China there was the typical "hill" jar, a burial pot from the Han period[19], having a cover representing the magic mountain.
Religious significance expressed in craft and art can also be perceived, for instance in the bronze water-jars and bronze ewers dating from the Singhasari period[20]. The water-jar consists of a globular body and a mountain-shaped lid decorated with rocks, whereas the ewer or water vessel has a lid with many tiers suggesting the replica of Mount Mahameru. A naga spout and rock motifs complete the ornamentations.

A similar example is provided by a terracotta amrta container from Blambangan, East Java. The body of the pot is decorated with hillocks and lotus plants shaped into five stylized garuda heads, and the figure of a hermit sitting in front of a cave[21]. (plate no. 8a, b). A mountain with many peaks tops the whole pice.

Mountains, rock and vegetation motifs were also much preferred features for the ornamentation of other objects, such as dagger sheaths, batiks, the "gunungan" for wayang performances, etc.[22]

The religious value attached to certain kind of art objects seemed gradually to be decreasing since the Majapahit period. A terracotta miniature from Trowulan[23] (Plate no. 9) depicts a landscape with a hermit sitting in front of his hermitage, and awaiting the arrival of a visitor. The latter is approaching through a path leading up to the hermitage. Round stones and trees adorn the scenery. The square base and the hollow interior is as at Kudus. This piece must have graced some nobleman's abode, though, in this instance, the sacred character of the artifact is obiviously less when compared with the amrta vessels.

The period of the Majapahit empire corresponded with the bloom of the second phase of classical art when indigeous characteristics prevailed in architecture, sculpture, literature and other arts.

The Majapahit period also marked the flourishing of "miniature" art when artists created small objects made of stone or terracotta, shaping them into figurines of men, animals, shrines and houses similar. to those depicted on the terracotta of Kudus. Sometimes they were modelled in a very lively fashion.

In the Indus valley, where many terracotta figurines have been found, the objects were generally used for worship[24]. Terracotta figurines and miniature shrines and houses were used in China as burial gifts[25]. This seemed also to be the tradition in several places in East Java and Bali. In the surroundings of the stupa of Sumberawan, in Malang, and the cave of Siti Jedog, Blitar, both in East Java, for instance, were found terracottas figurines which appeared to be used as offerings for deceased persons[26]. In Bali, people still offer figurines made of flour and terracotta during temple festivals. This usage has gradually been declining, and the figurines have become mere decorative art objects.

Kalangwan is a song in praise of nature[27]. The beauty of nature has always attracted painters and poets all over the world, not only in ancient Indonesia. But although we have ample proof of the existence of poems or kakawins from the classical (Hindu-Buddhist) period in which the poets lavishly glorify the beauty of the nature in their songs, no painting of the period, however, survives[28]. It is plausible that the absence of painting is due to the perishable materials that were used.
There are however, prehistoric paintings still in existence in other areas of Indonesia, such as the cave and rock paintings in South Sulawesi and West Irian. Paintings also remain from the Islamic period known as *wayang beber* or scrolls depicting puppet play stories.

The old Javanese poets used to roam the country-side with their writing instruments, consisting of the "tanah" (a kind of writing slate) and the "karas" (a board or tablet). In praising the beauty of the landscape they frequently alluded to it as being in human or animal forms, and sometimes again, it was the reverse. It was the animals which had the appearance of vegetation. Therefore we find in the *Arjuna Wiwaha* for instance, the description of the mountain looking like an ascetic wearing a robe of clouds and a breadfruit-tree resembling his large cap[30]. The charms of nature were not only sung by the poets, they were also carved on temple reliefs and sculptures such as at Prambanan, Panataran and other temples.

The tradition still persisted in the ensueing period, when Islam religion and culture became integrated into the existing societies. Islam did not bring about much change in the cultural life of the people. Although mosques started to be built on the coastal area in the sixteenth century, the builders of these religious edifices still employed sculptors who used to work for the carving of the temples. It was therefore not too surprising to find several parts of a mosque or a tomb to be decorated with motifs which were popular in the previous period.

The stone medallions on the walls of the old mosque and cemetery of Mantingan, about 12 km south of Japara, Semarang, are decorated with reliefs depicting mountainous scenery with fauna, flora and pavilions, which remind us of Trowulan. Because orthodox Islam forbids the representation of living beings, only the plants retain their natural form, whereas the animals are depicted in a stylized form, and seem to mingle with the foliage surrounding them[31].

Similar decorations are found at the cemetery of Sendangduwur, Tuban, East

Java, except that at Sendangduwur they are carved on wood. Reminiscent of classical art are the winged gateways, which symbolize a flying garuda and at the same time a mountain and a tree of life[32] (Plate no.11).

The art of Majapahit expanded along the north coast of Java, where it is called "the art of pasisir (coastal area)"[33], and so we have similar artistic traits from Trowulan, Sendangduwur, Tuban, Kudus, Japara, Ceribon, and finally Banten. In the palace of Kasepuhan in Cirebon for instance, we find a sculpture of a mountain of rocks as decoration. There is also the rockgarden in Sunyaragi, where the rocks in some places are shaped into an elephant form.

The idea of the elephant-rock which slightly resembles the elephant-shaped hills on the relief of Kudus is also found on a terracotta incense-burner from Ceribon[34]. (plate no.10). The space between its legs are filled with reliefs of plants on hillocks. The legs proper look more like lotus tubers from which the elephant pulls out a blooming lotus stalk.

The date and the function of the terracotta miniatures in Kudus.
Before considering further the functional significance of the terracottas, we will place them in the sequence of art history in accordance with their physical features.

On account of the landscapes depicted, adorned with pavilions, mountains and caves which are shaped into an animal or other creature form, they are a continuation of the Majapahit art, and the tradition must date from the hightide of the Old Javanese literally life, when the deer was inseparable from the hermitage's life and the dog from the hunting scenes in the woods.

For comparison we will refer to some lines mentioned in Old Javanese kakawins, which range in date from the tenth to the eighteenth century.
The relief of the "hanging hermitage" which seems to be squeezed between the mountains will fit nicely into the following capto (Sorandaka: 1939: I:5):

Liwat ing margasengkamanggih pajajaran/lilangungang kaaksi/ri wijil ing arka/ri agra ning parwata. . . . . .[35]

translation.

Leaving the steep path behind, upon a recluse they came/how beautiful it looked, like peeping down on its surroundings it seemed/at sunrise/(when the sun) emerged (behind) the mountain-top. . . . . .

The Arjuna Wiwaha (1926:II:2) also mentioned the existence of a resting pavilion:
alas katemu sanggraheng tamuy an amalaku jawuh i tanggaling kapat,[36].

translation.

In the woods they found a resting pavilion provided for the guests who might be caught in the rain while travelling in the rainy season,

Elephant shaped rocks were common features in the kakawins, as shown in canto XV:9 of the same poem:

. . ring mapasir mapandan akarang liman asemu leyep tininghalan.[37].

translation.

. . the beach, the pandanus shrubs, and the rocks resembling elephants were nearly too hazy to behold.

Artificial mountains and caves were also known by poets as described in the Smaradahana, canto IV:16.

Kulwan-kidulnya gainaga linurah hawanya. Endah gunungnya, ginawe minaha guhanya[38].

translation.

In the south west part was layed out a dry ricefield with a cleaned up path. The (artificial) mountains and caves being beautifully shaped.

When we come to the dating of the miniatures, because some animals are depicted in a natural manner, which Islam would never allow, they must have originated from the classical period. And since some of the traits such as the floral elements are closest to the art of sixteenth century Mantingan, we may draw our conclusion, that they were made in the late classical or the transitional period, the approximate date being the late fifteenth century.

This corresponds with the fact that the site of Jurang lies only about 12 km south of Kudus, where the Islamic culture flourished in the sixteenth century and only a few kilometres north-east of Demak, the first Moslem kingdom to succeed the Hindu kingdom of Majapahit.

Since the Majapahit period miniatures depicting mountain became of a more decorative element for homes and other structures, just as the terracottas of Kudus also served a similar function of decoration. They were put inside a niche or against a wall so as to show only the ornamented part. So this gunungan or miniature mountain, at first a symbol of the holy cosmic mountain, became a mere ornamentation, the dream of a poet coming into existence by the hand of an artist.

Notes:

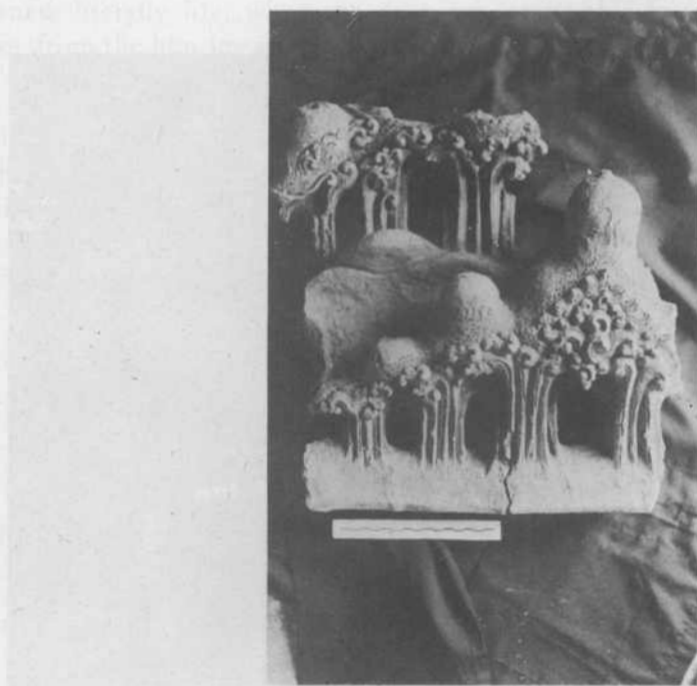
1. Vide Salam, Solichin. *Kudus Purbakala dalam perjuangan Islam.* 1977, p.55.
2. Jasper, J.E. "Het stadje Kudus en zijn oude kunst" *Nederlandsch Indie – Oud en Nieuw. 7e jaargang afl 1, 1922, pp 3 ff.*
3. Pigeud, Th. *Java in the fourteenth century. Vol I* canto 78: 4:3, 1960. p.60. Here Suci is mentioned together with the simas Nadi, Abhaya, Tiyah, Pakuwukan, and Kiyal. Pakuwukan, and Kiyal.
4. see pl. no. 1.
5. ibid no. 2
6. ibid no. 3 and 4.
7. ibid no. 5.
8. Galestin, Th.P. *Houtbouw op Oost Javaansche tempelreliefs.* 1936. Hoofdstuk IV pp 100 ff.
9. Ibid. The diamond-shaped rooftiles resembling those depicted at Sendangduwur, pp 120 ff.
10. Ibid. op. cit. pp. 121 ffpl VI.
11. see pl. no.6.
12. see pl. no.7.
13. Bernet Kempers, A.J. *Ancient Indonesian Art.* 1959. p12.
14. Kramrisch, Stella. *The Hindu Temple.* 1946.pp 169–170.
15. Schafer, Edward H. *Ancient China.* 1974. pp 102–103.
16. Lee, Sherman. E, *A History of Far Eastern Art.* pp. 229–230.
17. Bernet Kempers, A.J.op.cit, p 20–21.
18. Bosch. F.D.K., *Selected studies in Indonesian Archaeology.* 1961.pp 51–52.
19. Lee Sherman, E. op.cit. p67, p170.
20. Fontein. J, Soekmono R, Sulaiman S. *Kesenian Indonesia Purba* 1971.pp 156–157. plts. 70 and 73
21. see pl. 8
22. Hoop, A.N.J. Th. a Th. van der, *Indonesische siermotieven.* 1949, pp. 232–289.
23. see pl. 9
24. Lee, Sherman E. op.cit.pp.18 ff.
25. ibid op.cit. pp. 18 ff.
26. Satari, Soejatmi. "Some notes on terracotta objects in Indonesia". Paper presented at the VI th. IAHA conference in Jogyakarta, 1974. Unpublished.
27. An elaborate treatise on this subject-matter has been dealt with by Zoetmulder, P.J. *Kalangwan.* A survey of Old Javanese Literature, 1974.
28. We only know from the *Kidung Sunda* (Berg, C.C.1927b) how king Hayam Wuruk of Majapahit fell in love with the Sundanese princess after one of his court artists brought back a potrait he painted of the latter.

29. We know not for sure whether some of the Balinese drawings on lontar dated from this period.
30. *Arjuna Wiwaha,* canto II:1.
31. See plates 17, 18 and 20 of the *Oudheidkundig Verslag* 1930.
32. Tjandrasasmita, Uka. *Sepintas mengenai peninggalan kepurbakalaan Islam di Pesisir Utara Jawa* 1976.p.6.
33. Ibid. "Art de Majapahit et art du pasisir". Archipel 9 1975.pp.93 ff.
34. see pl. 10.
35. Berg, Dr.E.J. van den, *De val van Sora.* Verhandelingen van het Koninklijk Instituut voor de taal-land-en volkenkunde van Nederlandsch Indie.
36. Purbatjaraka (Lesya). Dr.R.Ng, *Arjuna Wiwaha.* Tekst en Vertaling 1926.
37. ibid. op.cit.
38. ibid. *Smaradahana.* Bibliotheca Javanica, 1931.

List of Illustration

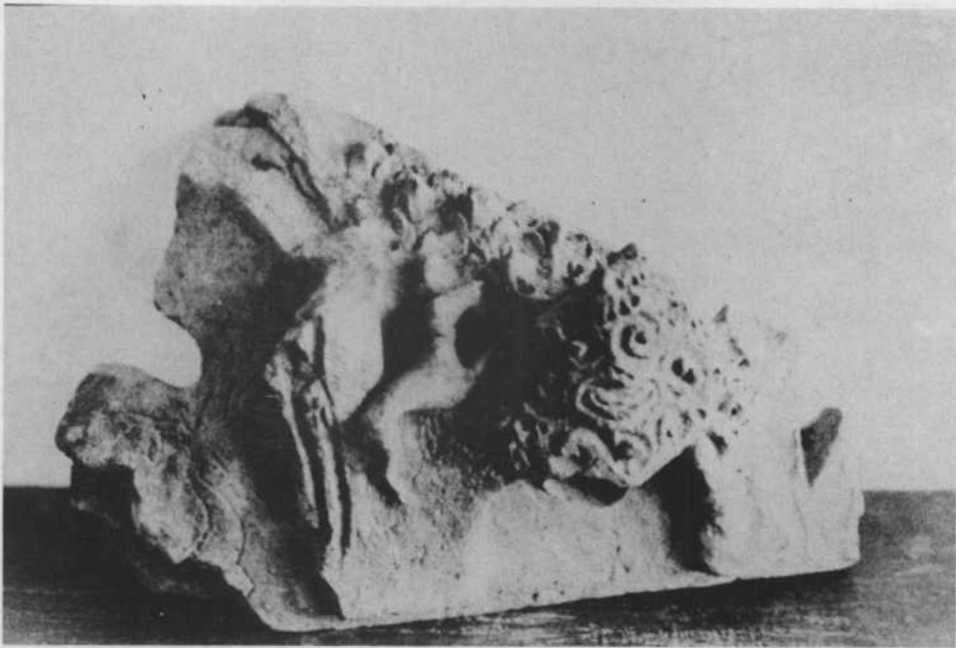
Pl 1a. Site of finds at Jurang, Kudus

Pl 1b. Site of finds at Jurang, Kudus

Pl 2. Terracotta decorated with stylized kala-head

Pl 3. Terracotta depicting hills with floral decorations.

Pl. 4. A stylized elephant's head and a fragment of a pavillion

Pl. 5. A "hanging hermitage" looking over the hills

Pl. 6. A bull (?) and an unidentified animal sitting dos–a–dos, framing the caves below.

Pl.7. A sporting dog in the woods

P1.8. An amrta container with a mountain – top shaped cover, from Blambangan, East Java, the front side

Pl. 8b. The backside

Pl.9. A terracotta house decoration from Trowulan, East Java.

Pl. 10. A terracotta incense burner from Camara, Ceribon

Pl. 11. The winged gateway at Sendang duwur, Lamongan, East Java

BIOGRAPHY

Mrs. Sri Soejatmi Satari graduated at the University of Indonesia in 1963 and has been serving the Archaeological Service since 1960.

From 1966 until 1975 she has been Head of the Departement of Documentation and Publication of the Archaeological Service.

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